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AFT Healthcare

Testimony of
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In Support of Raised Bill 968
An Act Concerning Reports of Nurse Staffing Levels
March 15, 2013

Good Morning Senator Gerratana, Representative Johnson and members of the Public Health Committee. On behalf of the Danbury Nurses' Union I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 968, legislation to require hospitals to report staffing levels quarterly to the Department of Public Health.

Today, we expect every product that we buy, to have a label that lists all its contents, from a gallon of milk to lawn care products. Would anyone in this room buy a car not knowing what features are covered by the list price? Yet we all spend our healthcare dollars without knowing if we are getting the best healthcare that money can buy. How do we measure the quality of care in a Connecticut hospital? What tools do we have to make a comparison between hospitals? Research shows that, staffing levels are the best indicator of high quality care. Research data also shows that good staffing levels equal better outcomes.

The staffing committees have been used to develop staffing plans, but hospitals have much latitude in developing staffing levels. When trying to determine which hospital to go to for treatment, the public does not have the opportunity to objectively compare and evaluate the care they will receive among different health care institutions. You have the opportunity to change that with SB 968.

Since the 1990s, hospitals have been down staffing to reduce costs, labor is their largest expense. The result has been staffing shortages with fewer nurses and other health care workers, at the bedside providing care. Numerous studies have shown what nurses have long reported anecdotally: understaffing threatens patient safety and undermines the quality of care.

- The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) reports that inadequate nurse staffing has been a factor in 24% of cases involving accidental death, injury or permanent loss of function reported since 1997.

- A landmark study by nursing researchers at the University of Pennsylvania found that with each additional surgical patient above four that a nurse is required to care for, the likelihood of death within 30 days of hospital admission is increased by 7%.

The public needs access to information to make informed decisions about their health care, especially if that decision could be a matter of life or death. By giving the public the right to know staffing levels in any hospital, they can make comparisons and make informed decisions about the quality of care they want for themselves and their loved ones.

SB 968 takes a critical step toward assuring patients, their families and our communities that they will get safe high quality care in Connecticut hospitals. This legislation will improve our ability to evaluate existing staffing levels in Connecticut hospitals as well as the measures hospitals use to provide safe staffing.

If we require hospitals to monitor and report their staffing levels, we will see a systematic improvement in staffing levels that will help reduce healthcare costs and mortality rates at Connecticut hospitals. I urge you to support SB 968.

Thank you.

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